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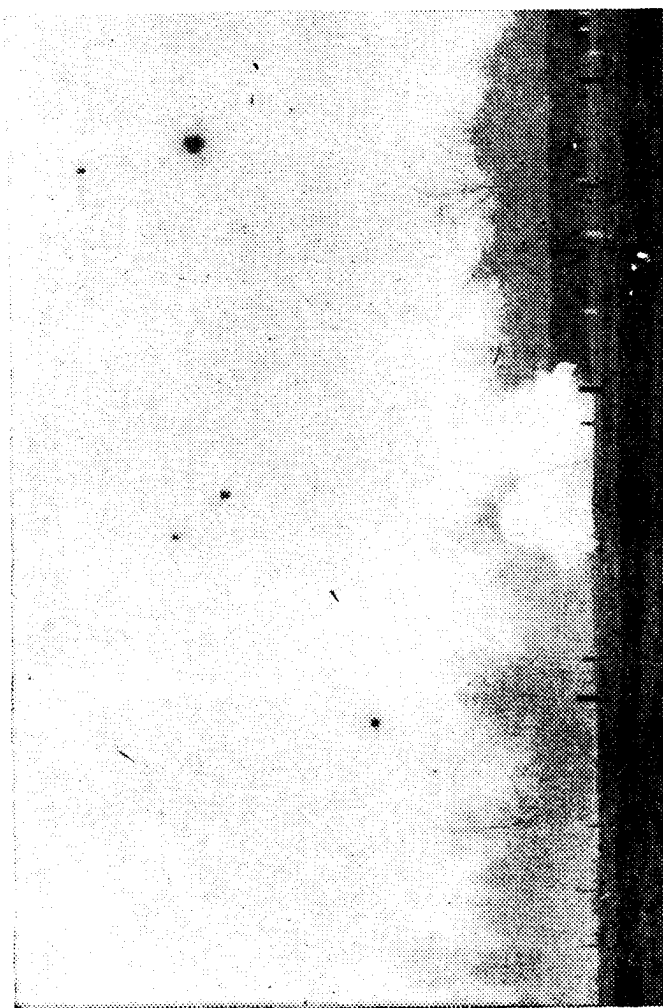
City Life

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SECTION B ... SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1957 B1



By Dick Darcey, Staff Photographer
of the missile. At right, surrounded by friends after launching, is Michael Kelley, 1715 Allison st. who built the rocket with Davis. "At least it didn't fizzle," was Kelley's comment. Story on Page 1



Lynbrook dr., Bethesda, carries the missile to a rocket-launcher. In the center photo the rocket has just left the launcher, which is obscured by dust and smoke, and has exploded in the air. The specks in the sky are pieces

This was the beginning and the ending of an ill-starred launching of their home-made rocket by two Washington area students yesterday at Camp A. P. Hill, Va., 60 miles south of the Nation's Capital. At left Jack Davis, 7908

Explosion Wrecks D.C. Rocket Test

Casing of Boys' Device Too Thin To Stand Blast

By Jerry Landauer
Staff Reporter

CAMP A. P. HILL, Va., Nov. 23—Two of the Nation's youngest missile experts tried in vain to launch a powerful 5½-foot home-made rocket in freezing rain here today. It didn't rise. It exploded.

After a 60-mile trek from Washington to this Army reservation in Caroline County, Jack Davis, 16, of 7908 Lynbrook dr., Bethesda, and Michael Kelley, 17, of 1715 Allison st. ne., were ruffled by the failure but heartened by the explosion.

Lieut. Col. Charles M. Parkin, the boys' mentor through their six months labor on the rocket, said its failure to take flight in no way reflected on the skill and ingenuity of its designers. Col. Parkin, an officer at the Engineer Research and Development Laboratory, Fort Belvoir, said the rocket propellant was simply too powerful for its casing.

The young rocket men took much the same view in consoling their disappointed parents.

"It blew up, mom," Jack explained to his mother, Claire, "but at least it didn't just sit there and fizzle."

Mike's father, Robert, first thought the firing was successful. From his vantage point behind a bunker 500 yards away, he and nearly 100 well-wishers and a detachment of Army men, including two colonels and three captains, could hear only a muffled roar and see only a puff of gray smoke from the launching site.

The elder Kelley's wish for a dramatic climax to his son's labors proved irresistible.

"Did you see it streak up?" he asked the unconvinced. "Boy, oh boy"

Several other watchers, in-

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cluding one or two of the Army men, also said they saw something streak upward into the heavily overcast sky.

No one could be certain though, until the watching party, the two rocket builders in the vanguard, had slogged its way through biting rain and ankle-deep mud to the launching site set in the rifle range of this 77,000-acre reservation.

About 150 feet away were the tell-tale slivers of orange-colored steel pipe scattered in all directions. Col. Parkin looked it over closely and said: "They packed too much punch into it; that's all."

He said the trouble lay in the weakness of the steel casing, which was less than one-sixteenth of an inch thick—not nearly thick enough, as it turned out, to withstand the pressure of the igniting fuel.

Their Calculations

According to the boys' calculations, the rocket should have soared to an altitude of 17,500 feet at 1600 to 1800 miles an hour. It was to stay aloft for 15 seconds and fall free several miles from its launching after the motor thrust gave out.

The propellant, they said, was made of potassium nitrate and sugar with paraffin as a binding. The hot gases produced by carbon in the sugar and oxygen in the nitrate was expected to provide a thrust of 300 pounds through a divergent-convergent nozzle in the rocket's tail.

Gunpowder, packed into the rocket's body, was ignited by an army-produced fuse. In turn, the gunpowder ignited the rocket fuel.

When the rocket, was in place, everyone retreated behind the bunker. An Army ambulance stood nearby but nothing untoward happened. The last to leave the site were the young designers and Col. Parkin, who lit the fuse.